

## HOUSING.

---

### HOUSING POLICY FOR ONTARIO, CANADA.

A chronic shortage in workmen's housing became more or less acute as a result of war-time expansion of Canadian industry. The attention of the Ontario Government was called to this fact by the Great War Veterans' Association, and representations were subsequently made by the Toronto Board of Trade, the Manufacturers' Association, and organized labor bodies. On June 7, 1918, a provincial committee was appointed by an order in council. This committee has now made its report.<sup>1</sup>

The report comprises seven chapters of discussion devoted to a consideration of the need for housing, public policy in housing, land and taxation, social aspects of housing, rural housing, town planning, and the minimum essentials of a house. There are 10 appendixes setting forth the requirements and recommendations of the Canadian Federal Government in respect to housing;<sup>2</sup> a memorandum by Mr. Thomas Adams on housing and town planning in Great Britain; the first prize essay on the housing problem, by Mr. Albert H. Leake; the special prize essay, by Mrs. J. E. Wetherell; illustrations showing the advantages of group houses; suggested regulations for governing public loans to contractors and to commercial building companies; effect of car lines on real estate values; condemnation of land for municipal purposes; standard specifications and drawings, showing plans for inexpensive houses.

While the Ontario housing committee was at work, the Dominion Government enacted a measure appropriating \$25,000,000 for making loans to house-building companies and contractors upon a guaranty of the municipality where the houses are to be constructed, and the provincial legislature in July, 1918, likewise appropriated \$2,000,000 for a similar purpose.

This action is in line with the observations of the committee, which states that "the ideal system toward which housing policy seems to be moving is that of cooperative construction and control combined with municipal and governmental provisions of loans at the lowest current

<sup>1</sup> Canada. Ontario Housing Committee. Report, including standards for inexpensive houses adopted for Ontario, and typical plans. Toronto, 1919. 187 pp. Folded plans. Illustrated.

<sup>2</sup> A formal investigation was made by the Dominion Government, a report of which appears in summary in the *Labor Gazette* (Ottawa) for April, 1919, pp. 447-451.

rate of interest." Such a system as this, namely, of Government loans, has been in practice in Ontario since the passage of an act in 1913. The difficulty of its complete trial has probably been the lack of funds. This lack the Federal act appears to supply.

The copartnership tenants system could be realized under the Ontario act. In fact, the only difference between such a company and the Toronto Housing Co. would be in the personnel of the shareholders and in the application to finance and management of the principle of cooperation. The policy of the company would then be controlled not by public-spirited citizens, who have invested money on a restricted dividend basis, but by such citizens together with a much larger number of workmen and others who at the same time would be shareholders of the company and occupants of the houses.

Considering the land problem in connection with housing, the committee is of the opinion that "a fair assessment based on earning capacity would go far toward solving the land problem, especially if accompanied by measures to prevent the subdivision of agricultural land into building lots before they are needed for use, or before they are provided with transportation and other necessary services."

In considering the application of any of these expedients, recognition must be given to the fact that taxation reform is only one factor in the solution of the land problem, and that the primary purpose of taxation is the raising of revenue to meet community needs, not the correction of abuses. As community needs increase, as greater responsibilities are assumed—and the tendency is altogether in the direction of the transfer of responsibilities from the individual to society—fresh sources of revenue must be sought or the old sources must bear heavier burdens. It will probably be found that the taxes on land will need to be increased either absolutely or relatively to other sources of revenue. In any case, land taxation should be impartially based on the ascertained earning power of the land if put to adequate use. Value which is purely speculative—that is, which is based upon the supposed earning power of the land at some date in the future—should not serve to increase the assessment. On the other hand, the fact that land is idle or only partly used—a dilapidated house, for example, occupying space that should hold a good dwelling, a shop, or a warehouse—should not be allowed to reduce the assessment. The real value of the land can be determined only on the basis of actual returns examined over a period of years and in comparison with other properties similarly situated. It is a difficult task and one requiring intelligence and expert knowledge on the part of assessors.

At the same time it would be advisable, in the opinion of the committee, to make provision for a special tax on land values for which the owner is not responsible. Such a special tax on abnormal increases in land values may well be levied when the property is sold. The committee further recommends as feasible the condemnation of land for use in municipal housing schemes or in schemes managed by limited dividend companies under municipal control. "There can be no good reason longer to sustain a distinction between land needed for railways and land needed for houses."

In reference to rural housing, the committee concludes that financial assistance should be made available to farmers on terms

similar to those obtaining in the case of lot owners in the cities, except that where security is ample the provincial government may lend directly to the farmers; that plans and specifications of laborers' cottages and farm houses should be available on application to the department of agriculture; and that a policy of stimulating and regulating the supply of agricultural labor should be complementary to the encouragement of building houses for such labor.

So intimate a part of housing is town planning that the committee recommends that town planning be made obligatory for all urban municipalities in the Province. Pending the acceptance of such a policy, the provincial government shall provide an advisory staff of town-planning experts to assist municipalities which may undertake town-planning schemes. It is suggested that an educational campaign in town planning be carried on through the press and through the public schools.

Inasmuch as both the Federal and provincial governments made available certain provisions for housing loans, the committee rendered immediate practical aid by making certain suggestions in regard to the type of house, for the building of which the State was ready to render its aid. The essential features, as suggested by the committee, are as follows:

1. Sufficient land to give each family privacy and plenty of air.
2. Water-tight floors, walls, and roof.
3. One or more rooms for cooking, eating, and general day use.
4. Bedroom for parents' use.
5. Bedroom for male children.
6. Bedroom for female children.
7. Provision for toilet with sanitary water-closet and sewer connection.
8. Running water supply fit for drinking.
9. Kitchen sink with waste connection to sewer.
10. Uninterrupted daylight and ventilation through windows in every room.

Additional features which are so desirable as to be almost essential are:

1. Bathtub and lavatory, with hot and cold water supply.
2. Laundry tub, with hot and cold water supply.
3. Direct sunlight in all principal rooms.
4. A second room, in addition to that used for cooking.
5. Clothes closets.
6. Porches and verandas.

Further additions of desirable features would include:

1. Electric light.
2. A separate dining room.
3. A cellar.
4. Furnace for heating.

Concerning the general features of the workman's house, the committee observes that—

There is no good reason why an inexpensive house or group of houses should not be quite as attractive as larger and more expensive buildings. It is not, however, the purpose of this report to define the limits of good design. Good design is to a degree a matter of taste. Convenience and sound construction should receive primary consideration, but the appearance need not suffer on that account. As the life of the house is prolonged by good construction, so its value is enhanced by attention to architectural effect. True art is simple; and the inexpensive houses under consideration, if lines and proportions are carefully studied, may readily be made to satisfy the claims of art, and thus to become a source of pride and pleasure to the occupants and the community.